

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 of the Second Extraordinary Session
By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Mr. John H.
"Jack" DeWitt, Jr. of Nashville.

WHEREAS, it was with great sadness and a profound sense of loss that the members of this General Assembly and the citizens of our state learned of the death of John H. "Jack" DeWitt, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt was a distinguished and prominent citizen of the state of Tennessee who was wholly dedicated to his family, the greater Nashville community, and making our collective knowledge of astronomy as vast as space itself; and

WHEREAS, Jack DeWitt was a brilliant scientist whose pioneering discoveries and inventions will continue to help mankind for many generations to come; and

WHEREAS, born in 1906, Mr. DeWitt began his illustrious career in electronics and science at the tender age of eight, when he fixed a neighbor's doorbell; and

WHEREAS, his mother fueled the young scientist's gift and encouraged his lifelong enthusiasm by selling her hens and donating the backyard and chicken coop to serve as a makeshift laboratory for her son; and

WHEREAS, the son of a state judge and grandson of a Presbyterian minister, Mr. DeWitt had built a radio transmitter and aired Nashville's first radio broadcasts from an anteroom at Ward-Belmont College by the age of 16; and

WHEREAS, hoping for an overseas adventure, Jack DeWitt served as a radio operator aboard the Norwegian ship, the S.S. Ellis at the age of 18; and

WHEREAS, after briefly attending Vanderbilt University, Mr. DeWitt went to work in 1925 at WSM, a then fledgling radio station still under construction; he was running the control board when the station debuted on the air; and

WHEREAS, after a three-year stint, from 1929 – 1932, in New York at the famous Bell Telephone Laboratories, Mr. DeWitt returned to Nashville to serve as the new chief engineer at WSM; and

WHEREAS, now one of the biggest and best known radio stations in the South, WSM can credit much of its success to Jack DeWitt, who played a crucial role in the radio station's expansion from 5,000 to 50,000 watts: this expansion allowed WSM's signal to carry throughout the United States, and considerably abroad, and helped Nashville to become the country music capital of the world; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt enlisted in the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1942, after the United States had entered World War II; and

WHEREAS, during the war, Jack DeWitt diligently worked on the project that his friends and family aver was his crowning achievement—a secret U.S. Army project that foiled the Nazis and saved thousands of American lives; and

WHEREAS, this secret project centered around the invention of the proximity fuse, a pencil-size radio device that rode inside 105mm howitzer shells and dramatically increased accuracy; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Army awarded Mr. DeWitt the prestigious Legion of Merit for his meritorious work and lifesaving invention; and

WHEREAS, after the war, Jack DeWitt made another significant contribution to science: in 1946, he was the first person to bounce radar waves off the moon, earning him the sobriquet, “The Father of Radar Astronomy”; and

WHEREAS, this important milestone in space exploration and satellite technology has resulted in some of the most remarkable astronomical discoveries during the last half of this century, including the discovery that the planet Mercury rotates on its axis three times for every

two times it orbits the sun, and that Venus not only rotates more slowly than any of the other planets, but also rotates backwards; and

WHEREAS, in 1948, Mr. DeWitt returned to broadcasting as President of WSM; and

WHEREAS, two years later, he shrewdly supervised the launch of Channel 4 television, taking advantage of the innovative technique of using a series of microwave relays to transfer NBC's signal from Louisville to Nashville; and

WHEREAS, he was renowned as "one of the great pioneers of modern electronic media," and the relay system Mr. DeWitt co-developed brought television to Nashville long before the telephone company installed the land lines that transmitted NBC and other networks to Middle Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, under his astute leadership, Channel 4 gained national recognition as the first TV station in the country to broadcast a near-real-time weather satellite photo after he was the first to download pictures from a new government weather satellite; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt was a truly progressive thinker, and his friends have said of him, "his vision was so far ahead of his peers he was talking about satellites when many of his colleagues were still wondering what a radio clear channel was"; and

WHEREAS, in 1987, Mr. DeWitt's colleagues showed their undying appreciation and admiration for his unique talents by awarding him a regional Emmy award for lifetime achievement, the industry's highest award; and

WHEREAS, Jack DeWitt also possessed a great enthusiasm for astronomy; he wrote and co-wrote a number of scientific papers for various astronomical publications and collaborated on many astronomical research projects; and

WHEREAS, he helped Carl K. Seyfert realize his dream of building an astronomy observatory in Nashville which was named, Dyer Observatory; and

WHEREAS, the Dyer Observatory is still home to the 12-inch telescope Mr. DeWitt built with his brother, Ward, in 1934 and donated to the observatory in 1975; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt's telescope was formally dedicated at Dyer Observatory's 30th anniversary celebration in 1983; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt used this telescope to view Halley's Comet for the second time in his life in 1986; and

WHEREAS, many of Vanderbilt's master's degrees in astronomy have been awarded to students who performed the entirety of this astronomical research with the 12-inch telescope "heirloom" that Mr. DeWitt built; it is still used today for research and stargazing by the general public at the Dyer Observatory; and

WHEREAS, Mr. DeWitt was actively involved in an organization dedicated to bringing amateur and professional astronomers together to collaborate in the study of variable stars using photoelectric techniques; and

WHEREAS, a highly respected figure in both the fields of radio and television engineering and astronomy, Jack DeWitt was a voice of integrity in his profession and one of the most prominent members of the scientific community; and

WHEREAS, Jack DeWitt was honored as a Distinguished Alumnus of Vanderbilt's School of Engineering in 1974, and he served an estimable tenure as an Associate in the University's Astronomy Department; and

WHEREAS, during his illustrious lifetime, Mr. DeWitt established a highly reputable name for himself in the field of radio and television engineering, and he was often asked to share his expertise with various professional organizations; he shared his vast knowledge as a Fellow of the Institute of Radio Engineers, the Radio Club of America, and the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers; and

WHEREAS, he also served as the president of the Engineers Association of Nashville in 1949; and

WHEREAS, his voluminous contributions to the field of radio and television engineering were recognized by his receipt of numerous coveted awards, including the NAB Engineering

Achievement Award, and being named "Engineer of the Year" by *All Engineers Week* in 1983; and

WHEREAS, a civic-minded man, Jack DeWitt selflessly donated his valuable time and incredible talents to a number of community organizations: he was the chairman of the United Givers Fund in 1959; he served with acumen and alacrity as the director of the Nashville Symphony Association from 1957-1963; and he served with probity as the vice-chairman of the Board of the Metropolitan Airport Authority from 1982-1987; and

WHEREAS, in his limited spare time, Mr. DeWitt enjoyed sailing; he was a founding member of the Harbor Island Sailing Club and the Kentucky Lake Sailing Club; and

WHEREAS, Jack DeWitt was renowned for his honesty, work ethic, and his stalwart dedication to science; he was a man of vision who was committed to the future of his community and his state; and

WHEREAS, the legacy Mr. Jack DeWitt leaves behind will be fondly remembered and greatly treasured by his friends and associates for many years to come; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that this legislative body pause in its deliberations to remember the illustrious life of this fine Tennessean; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we hereby pause to mourn the death of Mr. John H. "Jack" DeWitt, Jr., while also rejoicing in the life of this exceptional man whose exemplary character, many accomplishments in the realms of science and technology, and voluminous contributions to the growth and prosperity of this state and this nation will be remembered and appreciated for generations to come.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our deepest sympathy and extend our condolences to the family and friends of Jack DeWitt.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

